



Encouraging EFL Students' Willingness to Communicate inside Vietnamese High School Classrooms: Teachers' Strategies and Students' Beliefs

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Abstract: Despite a currently proliferating interest in the second language (L2) willingness to communicate (WTC), much less has investigated Asian high school students' beliefs about L2 teachers' strategies to encourage WTC inside the classroom. This qualitative study explores the strategies employed by Vietnamese EFL teachers to encourage their students' WTC inside the classroom and students' beliefs about their teachers' strategies. Data were collected from semi-structured interviews with seven teachers and eight students. Results revealed that the teachers employed six main strategy groups, namely grouping, warm-up, topic choice, correction strategies, class atmosphere, and motivational strategies. Also, the students indicated their preferences for some strategies and suggested other strategies which they believed to be effective. They expressed expectations and suggested ways to improve their teachers' strategies to encourage WTC inside the classroom. The students' preferences and recommendations of strategies reflected contextual factors. As WTC is a context-sensitive construct, it might be necessary for L2 teachers to understand their students' beliefs to foster L2 WTC effectively inside the classroom.

Keywords: L2 Willingness to Communicate, Social Interaction, Students' Beliefs, Teacher Role, Teachers' Strategies.

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Introduction

Willingness to communicate (WTC) is defined as “readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons” (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998, p. 547). In second language (L2) education, L2 WTC is conceptualized as the extent to which students desire to initiate communication in the target language (Kang, 2005; Liu, 2021). MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, and Conrod (2001) proposed two main types of L2 WTC: inside and outside the classroom. As noted by Lee and Lu (2021), learners’ WTC outside the classroom is mainly manifested in multilingual countries using English as a second language (ESL) because multilingual communities have real-world opportunities to communicate. Thus, in EFL (English as a foreign language) contexts, the classroom can be considered “a typical place for English communication” (p. 1).

Recent research has shown the momentousness of communication or social interaction in L2 teaching and learning. According to Long’s (1983) interaction hypothesis, social interactions provide opportunities for language development; that is, interlocutors can acquire input and produce output in interactions with peers and teachers. Gao and Huang (2010) state that students’ communicative competence should be the ultimate goal of EFL education; therefore, students’ language use should be set as a priority in the EFL curriculum.

Given the crucial role of communication in second language acquisition (SLA), students’ WTC is suggested to be “one of the key concepts in L2 learning and instruction” (Kang, 2005, p. 278). As noted by Riasati (2012), fostering students’ WTC inside the classroom may be “a fundamental goal of L2 education” (p. 1287) because students with higher WTC engender more opportunities for L2 practice and authentic use (MacIntyre et al., 2001). A program of teaching English that cannot foster learners’ WTC is considered “simply a failed program” (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547).

Some researchers (e.g., Dörnyei, 2009; Vongsila & Reinders, 2016) argue for the teachers’ role in encouraging students’ WTC. Accordingly, teachers are recommended to understand students’ problems and provide pertinent scaffolding to support the learning process (Hung & Nguyen, 2022; van de Pol, Volman, & Beishuizen, 2010) since teachers “naturally play a vital role in encouraging learners’ WTC” (Vongsila & Reinders, 2016, p. 2). Assisting learners in communication is an onerous duty of L2 teachers in the classroom (Yashima, MacIntyre, & Ikeda, 2016) as various factors might influence one’s WTC. Thus, teachers may employ strategies to

encourage students interaction and simultaneously minimize negative factors in WTC (Shi, Baker, & Chen, 2019). To enhance students' communication in the classroom, it might be necessary to consider the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) to understand learners' competencies and problems (Hung & Nguyen, 2022; Yashima et al., 2016; Shi et al., 2019) as this concept indicates "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

The contemporary literature also indicates a growing interest in L2 students' beliefs. As students' beliefs and teachers' strategies mainly reflect their education, experience, context, and practice (Borg, 2011), there are potential incongruences between teachers' and students' beliefs (Nguyen & Hung, 2021; Ha & Nguyen, 2021). However, any mismatch between teachers' and students' perceptions may have adverse impacts on the learning process, learning outcomes (Ellis, 2008), behaviours, and learners' satisfaction (Ha & Nguyen, 2021).

There exist concerns about L2 communication inside the classroom in Asian contexts. Gao and Huang (2010, p. 83) argue that it has "more a decoration than a practical instruction to teaching". In Vietnam, where skill integration is a widely applied approach in L2 classrooms, many Vietnamese students stay silent and passive in classes until they are asked by the teacher instead of volunteering to give ideas (Le & Tran, 2019). That is, Southeast Asian students are generally inactive and do not usually start communication inside the classroom. They might want to protect their face and avoid communicating when the environment appears to be unsafe for them (Wen & Clément, 2003). However, little is known about L2 WTC in high schools in Asia, including Vietnam. Investigations into L2 students' WTC in Asian contexts would contribute to the literature on L2 teaching and learning in Asia. Given the importance of teachers' role in encouraging students' WTC inside the classroom and students' perspectives on their learning experience, the present study investigates the strategies used by teachers to encourage their students' WTC inside classrooms and students' beliefs about the strategies used by their teachers. This qualitative study seeks to address the following two research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What strategies do Vietnamese high school EFL teachers use to encourage students' WTC inside classrooms? How do the teachers employ these strategies?

RQ2: What are Vietnamese high school EFL students' beliefs about their teachers' strategies to encourage WTC inside the classroom?

Literature Review

WTC inside L2 Classrooms

A survey of the literature review shows that the construct of WTC has been developing and shifting in the past 20 years. McCroskey and Baer (1985) established a WTC construct based on the notion of *unwillingness to communicate*. This framework is defined as a durable trait-like and personality-based construct; that is, one can engage in different communicative events similarly. However, this framework is inclined to WTC in the first language. Motivated by McCroskey and Baer's concept, MacIntyre et al. (1998) developed a heuristic model of L2 WTC. They argued that WTC is a situational variable and fluctuates across situations; WTC is deemed to be "a situational variable with both transient and enduring influences" (p. 546). This model presents the concept of WTC as a complex six-layer pyramid, including two bigger groups with 12 variables underlying linguistic, communicative, and psychological aspects. However, this framework does not differentiate WTC inside and outside the classroom. MacIntyre et al. (2001) continued this research strand with a study on students' WTC in L2 French. These researchers classified WTC into two main types: inside and outside the classroom and developed a framework for L2 WTC inside the classroom with four main categories, namely speaking, writing, reading, and comprehension. However, this study reflected L2 WTC in an ESL context; thus, the classroom in this study is an immersion classroom which is quite different from the EFL classroom.

Several other studies have investigated factors that affect L2 learners' WTC inside the classroom. These factors employed psychological, linguistic, and communicative dimensions. The factors found are mainly L2 learning anxiety, L2 enjoyment (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2021; Khajavy, MacIntyre, & Barabadi, 2018; Li, Dewaele, Pawlak, & Kruk, 2022), L2 self-confidence (Fallah, 2014; Riasati, 2012), and self-perceived communication competence (Öz, Demirezen, & Pourfeiz, 2015), group size, communication context (Cao & Philp, 2006; Riasati, 2012), topic familiarity (Kang, 2005; Riasati, 2012), task types (Peng, 2014; Riasati, 2012), teacher's wait time (Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005; Zarrinabadi, 2014), students' attitude to L2 learning situation (Öz et al., 2015), motivation (Fallah, 2014; Hashimoto, 2002; Öz et al., 2015) classroom atmosphere (Ayedoun, Hayashi, & Seta, 2019; Peng, 2014), and teacher roles (Khajavy et al., 2018; Liu, 2021; Violanti, Kelly, Garland, & Christen, 2018; Vongsila & Reinders, 2016). Most, if not all, of these studies suggested that L2 instructors take into the aforementioned factors to promote students' WTC inside the classroom.

Teachers' Strategies to Encourage Students' WTC inside the L2 Classroom

Several studies (e.g., Liu, 2021) have emphasized teachers' role in encouraging students' WTC. They emphasize "the interpersonal behavior of the teacher" (p. 3). Teacher immediacy, defined as "nonverbal and verbal behaviors, which can reduce psychological and/or physical distance between teachers and students" (Christophel & Gorham, 1995, p. 292), is a vital key in enhancing L2 WTC inside the classroom. According to Violanti et al. (2018), teacher immediacy can bring about more expected outcomes for L2 learners, which can significantly foster L2 students' willingness to engage, which then enhances their academic performance.

Recent studies have suggested strategies that L2 teachers can employ in the classroom to promote students' WTC. These strategies were mainly classified, namely grouping strategies (Anwar, 2016), warm-up strategies (Vongsila & Reinders, 2016), topic choice strategies (Yashima et al., 2016), teachers' correction strategies (Peifer, Schönfeld, Wolters, Aust, & Margraf, 2020), and class atmosphere strategies (Ayedoun et al., 2019). The development of these strategies was mainly based on the factors that might affect L2 students' WTC.

Teachers can employ grouping to encourage their students to be more willing to communicate with "two or more individuals who are connected through social relationships" (Anwar, 2016, p. 108). Group members can communicate, influence, interact, and perform tasks together (Forsyth, 2006). According to Vygotsky (1978) and Devos (2016), group work's mediation and peer interaction can induce L2 learners' development. Cao and Philp (2006) noted that groups of three to four students may provide students with adequate opportunities to communicate. Kang (2005) suggested that teachers can weigh up the suitability of interlocutors in group work to foster their students' WTC. Agreeing with Kang (2005), Riasati (2012) added that group tasks (e.g., discussion and presentation) should be a variable that contributes to students' WTC in group work.

As recommended by Vongsila and Reinders (2016), teachers may use warm-up strategies to foster students' WTC. These activities can be employed for competency-based practices in EFL classes. Estalkhbijari and Khodareza (2012) claimed that warm-up activities play a facilitating role that makes learners ready for the upcoming lesson. Some warm-up activities were recommended. For instance, according to Vongsila and Reinders (2016), to warm up the class, L2 teachers may let students share their experiences and use images to stimulate discussion. Seçer, Şahin, and Alıcı (2015) suggested the use of videos as visual aids may lead students in the lesson and increase their concentration.

Topic choice is also what teachers should take into account. The right topic may motivate students to communicate. Assigned topics should arouse students' curiosity (Yashima et al.,

2016) and be familiar to them (Kang, 2005). For unfamiliar topics, teachers should leave sufficient time to prepare and make up their minds for communication; otherwise, they can be unwilling or reluctant to communicate (Le & Tran, 2019; Riasati, 2012).

Correction strategies employed by teachers may have an impact on their students' WTC. According to Le and Tran (2019) and Peifer et al. (2020), if a teacher corrects their students in a friendly and positive manner, students may be more willing to communicate. In Asian contexts, students may try to protect their face, known as social value and reputation. As they are generally emotionally charged, they may refuse to communicate when they find potential threats to their social value in the environment (Wen & Clément, 2003).

Finally, a positive learning environment can promote students' WTC. A relaxing, friendly, and supportive learning environment can enhance students' confidence (Peng, 2014) and communication (Li et al., 2022). L2 students, consequently, are naturally more willing to talk (Ayedoun et al., 2019). However, a classroom with boredom might negatively affect students' initial communication (Li et al., 2022).

Students' Beliefs about Teachers' Strategies to Encourage L2 WTC inside the Classroom

Beliefs or perceptions are conceptualized as "propositions individuals consider to be true [...], which are often tacit, have a strong evaluative and affective component, provide a basis for action, and are resistant to change" (Borg, 2011, pp. 370-371). It is the process in which people understand and manage emotions to create an authentic experience. Therefore, students' perception has been concerned as an important key to SLA. Hromova (2019) claimed that "students' perceptions of learning foreign languages are viewed as their attitudes to learning based on their past experiences" (p. 77). This means that how students perceive their learning experiences probably determines their learning process and academic performance (Ellis, 2008). In addition, teachers' behaviours might affect students' perceptions. Johnson, Uline, and Perez (2019) suggested that teachers' teaching styles might be different; however, the teachers have to "demonstrate courtesy and respect in all interactions" (p. 1) and make their students feel valued. In other words, if students positively perceive their teacher's strategies to encourage their WTC, they will be more willing to communicate and vice versa.

A study by Zarrinabadi (2014) investigated the students' perceptions of their teachers' strategies to influence their tendency to talk. Some students stated that when teachers gave them sufficient time to organize what to say and think about the linguistic characteristics, they were more willing to communicate; however, some students claimed that the short time allotted

for their preparation might lead them to embarrassment. Besides, they appreciated the chances given by teachers to choose the topics that they were more familiar with, knowledgeable about, and interested in the classroom instead of far-away topics. In the same vein, when teachers delayed error correction until they finish their speech, they would feel more pleasant communicating rather than teachers correcting grammatical form or pronunciation during their speech. Also, they agreed that teachers' behaviours such as smiling, nodding in agreement, and being friendly supported them in continuing the speech, and vice versa, they felt less willing to communicate when a teacher looked at the book to find the things he wanted to correct immediately. However, the researcher admitted that the use of focus essays was the main limitation. The following research might use other data sources, such as interviews.

In summary, previous studies investigated factors that influence L2 students' WTC. Little is known about strategies used by Asian EFL teachers to encourage WTC inside the classroom and students' beliefs about their teachers' strategies. Investigations into students' beliefs about L2 teachers' strategies to encourage WTC inside the classroom would provide implications for L2 teaching and learning in high schools in Vietnam and other L2 contexts.

Method

Design

The current study employed a qualitative approach by administering semi-structured interviews with participants in Ben Tre Province, Vietnam. To answer RQ1, interviews were conducted with high school EFL teachers. To address QR2, students who were taught by the teachers were selected for interviews about their beliefs about the strategies employed by their teachers.

Participants and Settings

This study employed convenience sampling. It involved 15 Vietnamese participants (seven teachers and eight students) at two rural high schools in Ben Tre Province. The seven Vietnamese EFL teachers (three males and four females) had an experience of more than 10 years as EFL teachers in Vietnam. The eight high school EFL students, four males and four females taught by the teachers were also chosen conveniently. The teachers and students were anonymized as T1-T7 and S1-S8 in this study. In this context, the students had few opportunities to communicate with foreigners.

Instruments

The present study employed two different semi-structured interview protocols. The first semi-structured interview protocol, adapted from Vongsila and Reinders (2016), was used to investigate the strategies employed by the teachers to encourage their students' WTC. It consisted of six main parts: (1) warm-up, (2) grouping, (3) topic choice, (4) correction and corrective feedback, (5) learning environment, and (6) others. The researchers added several guiding questions about why and how the teachers used the strategies.

The second one, adapted from Zarrinabadi (2014), was utilized to explore how the students perceived their teachers' strategies. The interview protocol began with some items confirming the strategies employed by the teachers. These items were used to triangulate data regarding the use of self-reports to investigate the strategies by the teachers to answer RQ1. Six main strategies were included in the interview protocol asking about students' beliefs: (1) grouping, (2) warm-up, (3) topic choice, (4) correction and corrective feedback, (5) learning environment, and (6) other motivational strategies. The first author, as the interviewer, asked guiding questions to delve into students' beliefs, such as "What/Which do you prefer?", "Why do you think so?" or "Why not?", and "How does it benefit you?"

Data Collection Procedure

The researchers sent email invitations to teachers and students at two high schools in Ben Tre, Vietnam. Sixteen of them responded, and fifteen of them showed up for interviews. Data were collected from January to May 2022 and data collection consisted of two main phases. The participants orally consented to the interviews. All the interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and recorded by the first author for analysis. The first author invited seven teachers for semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The interviews were conducted in person or through video calls on Zoom because of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. Each interview lasted from 30 to 45 minutes. Subsequently, interviews with students were conducted on a focus-group basis. The use of focus-group interviews with students was to increase the trustworthiness of the collected data. Each interview included four students (two males and two females). During the interviews, the participants' responses were confirmed and clarified by the interviewer. Each interview lasted about 60 and 90 minutes.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data gathered from the interviews with teachers and students were analyzed thematically. The procedure was based on Braun and Clarke's (2012) framework with six phases. Interviews were first transcribed. Transcripts retrieved were then projected to MAXQDA for analysis. Initial codes were then generated, and emerging themes and subthemes were then identified and labelled. The themes and subthemes were finally refined and interpreted. The data analysis mainly focused on the content and did not consider the participants' language problems. Typical quotes are presented as illustrations in accompaniment with the themes and subthemes in the results section.

The data collected from the interviews with the teachers showed six emerging themes: (1) *grouping*, (2) *warm-up*, (3) *topic*, (4) *error correction*, (5) *environment*, and (6) *other motivational strategies*. They referred to six groups of strategies that the teachers employed to encourage their students' WTC. Each strategy of these groups was labelled as a subtheme.

Analysis of the interviews with the students showed three broad emerging themes: *preferred*, *rejected*, and *suggested*. The students' responses that indicated the teachers' strategies enhanced their WTC were identified as *preferred*. The teachers' strategies that were believed by the students to discourage their WTC were labelled as *rejected*. The strategies recommended by the students that their teachers did not deploy were named *suggested*.

Results

Teachers' Strategies to Encourage Students' L2 WTC inside the Classroom

Data analysis showed that the seven teachers used six strategies to encourage students' WTC inside the classroom (see Table 1). The themes show the strategies used by the teachers. Their descriptions of how they applied such strategies and explanations for using them were coded as subthemes. The frequency shows the number of teachers giving the corresponding explanation.

All the teachers revealed that they employed grouping strategies to encourage students to communicate. They divided students into groups of 4 to 6 by using classroom seating proximity. They explained that this grouping technique was time-saving and avoided making noise for nearby classes.

Every classroom contains from 45 to 48 students, so it is very difficult and time-consuming for us to use other ways of making groups. [...] One more thing, whenever they (students) move around, this causes annoying noise to the nearby classes (T6).

The teachers also considered students' English proficiency levels in the grouping. In most cases, they selected students at different levels into one group in the hope that high-level students can help scaffold lagging students. Occasionally, the teachers changed group members to avoid monotone in group work; thus, students had opportunities to interact with as many peers as possible. They employed different group tasks in group work such as debate, discussion, presentation, wall newspaper design, and role-play. T6 explained that "role-play worked well after I taught a structure, my students would love to apply what they had just learnt (sic.)".

At the warm-up stage, four teachers took advantage of visual aids, such as watching videos, talking about pictures, or telling stories accompanied by pictures to motivate their students to communicate. These teachers claimed they should implement various activities, which were based on the main theme of the units, with an explanation that "students will feel more interested and act passionately, and vice versa, they feel bored and weary. It is because they are curious and excited about what is going to happen that they cannot expect" (T4). However, they rarely organized a game for students to play and learn since they did not have enough time for it.



Table 1. *Teachers' Strategies to Encourage WTC inside the Classroom*

Theme	Subtheme	Frequency	Teachers employing
Grouping	Seat proximity (time-saving, less noise)	7	All
	Mixed-level grouping	6	T1, T2, T4, T5, T6, T7
	Changing group members	6	T1, T2, T4, T5, T6, T7
	Changing group tasks	7	All
Warm-up	Questions	6	T1, T2, T3, T5, T6, T7
	Visual aids	4	T3, T4, T5, T6
	Various techniques	7	All
	Games (rare: little time)	3	T2, T3, T4
	Teacher' questions	3	T2, T3, T4
Topic	Based on the textbook (required by the curriculum)	7	All
	Modify the topic slightly (rare: hard to modify)	3	T3, T5, T6
	Assigning prior readings (familiarize students)	6	T1, T2, T3, T5, T6, T7
	Assigning debatable topics (rare: much preparation due to activities and students' level)	2	T5, T6
	Indirectly > relaxation	6	T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7
Error correction	Not interrupt students	7	All
	Giving feedback to the whole class	7	All
	Turning feedback to be positive	6	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6
	Almost neglected	7	All
Environment	Occasionally using games, jokes, singing, chats > relaxation	6	T1, T2, T4, T5, T6, T7
	Assigning tasks for homework > confidence, positive attitudes	7	All
Others	Helping laggards > rapport between teachers and students	3	T2, T4, T5
	Calling upon a name randomly > familiarize students with CLT	7	All
	Giving pluses to encourage volunteers	7	All

However, the topics used by the teachers were mainly found in the prescribed textbooks. In cases where these topics seemed to be too difficult or unfamiliar for the majority of the class, they modified them slightly. They admitted that they never picked up topics outside to replace the ones in the textbook because these topics were required in the curriculum. The teachers also considered visual aids such as videos and pictures and prior readings as their essential tools to help their students be more familiar with unfamiliar topics. T5 explained that it is “because the prior readings contain the language, both vocabulary and main structures in the unit, students can learn and apply them for communication through them”. Furthermore, some topics that were considered by the teachers to make their students willing to communicate were fashion, hobbies, family and friends, music, film, and food. They also employed debatable topics to enhance WTC among their students but stated that it was necessary to prepare activities carefully and consider students’ proficiency levels.

All teachers only corrected their students indirectly which, according to these teachers, could make their students’ mistakes seem less serious and the learning environment relaxing. They waited until their students finished the performance as they did not want to interrupt their students. Interestingly, they gave feedback to the whole class instead of feedback to individuals. According to the teachers, teachers’ and peers’ positive feedback was crucial to students’ WTC. T3 suggested that “we should talk about good points of their performance first. This is very important since it makes them feel appreciated, then we mention some points which need improvements and correct them”.

Most teachers revealed that they did not consider the effect of the learning environment on students’ WTC. They also claimed that they were aware that they needed to change class activities regularly, but they could not. Few others were more likely to create a relaxing atmosphere by organizing educational games, recounting humorous experiences, holding singing events for students, and telling jokes in English communicatively with their students.

Several other measures were also implemented by the teacher to help enhance the students' WTC inside the classroom. For example, they let their students prepare ideas at home before they presented their ideas in class to increase speakers’ confidence with their careful preparation and positive attitude towards the task. They also circulated the classroom to assist those who were reluctant to communicate, and then give them advice. The teachers explained that this way could help students develop a good rapport with teachers and students. Some teachers revealed that they sometimes required students to communicate by calling upon a name randomly. However, they suggested giving pluses to encourage students instead of only

forcing them. This strategy was believed by the teachers to familiarize students with the communicative approach with an exciting attitude.

Overall, the teachers revealed that they used a variety of techniques to enhance students' WTC inside the classroom. These strategies should not be considered distinct, but they influenced each other. For instance, giving positive feedback was considered to encourage WTC, but this technique, as said by the teachers, made the classroom or learning environment relaxing. Also, familiar topics and comprehensible tasks were used by the teachers to encourage students' WTC as students did not have to deal with linguistic difficulty. The teachers' self-reports also showed that the characteristics of the topics could amuse and entertain students greatly. That means students' positive effects could be a mediating factor that encouraged students' WTC inside the classroom.

Students' Perceptions of teachers' Strategies to Encourage L2 students' WTC inside the Classrooms

Data analysis showed how the eight students perceived their teachers' strategies to encourage their WTC inside the classroom (see Table 2). The students believed that some strategies fostered WTC (preferred strategies), but some strategies did not encourage or even discourage WTC (rejected strategies). They also suggested other strategies that their teachers did not use but they believed the strategies could be effective. In Table 2, the frequency shows the number of students providing the corresponding responses.

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Table 2. *Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Strategies to Encourage WTC inside the Classroom*

	Teachers' strategies	Theme		
		Frequency of codes		
		Preferred	Rejected	Suggested
Grouping	Seat proximity (time-saving, less noise)	1	7	1
	Mixed-level grouping	6	1	2
	Changing group members	2	6	0
	Changing group tasks	6	2	0
Warm-up	Visual aids	8	0	0
	Various techniques	8	0	0
	Games (rare: little time)	2	6	6
	Teacher's questions	8	0	0
Topic	Based on the textbook (required by the curriculum)			
	Modify the topic slightly (rare: hard to modify)	0	0	8
	Assigning prior readings (familiarize students)	8	0	0
	Assigning debatable topics (rare: much preparation due to activities and students' level)	5	3	0
Error correction	Indirectly > relaxation	7	1	0
	Not interrupt students	6	2	0
	Giving feedback to the whole class	8	0	0
	Turning feedback to be positive	8	0	0
Environment	Almost neglected	0	4	8
	Occasionally using games, jokes, singing, chats > relaxation	8	0	0
Others	Assigning tasks for homework > confidence, positive attitudes	8	0	0
	Helping laggards > rapport between teachers and students	8	0	0
	Calling upon a name randomly > familiarize students with CLT	8	0	0

Giving pluses to encourage volunteers	8	0	2
Total	124	39	30

Students mainly reflected contextual factors and their experiences in their beliefs. Their preferences or rejections of their teachers' strategies were mainly based on how their teachers applied the strategies rather than the strategies themselves. Also, the strategies which the students recommended mainly derived from their previous experiences. In fact, they suggested the strategies which they had experienced with other teachers in the courses they had taken at language centres or in earlier grades. For example, S3 responded that she was more willing to communicate at a language centre than at school. She said, "I prefer studying English at the language centre. [...] We sing, play games, communicate about whatever we like, and have fun at the centre. [...] At school, these activities are like decorations, and we are mostly required to do written exercises". However, this is understandable as Vietnamese high school teachers were expected to help their students get good results in the national high school graduation examinations which were written tests. Therefore, they could not only focus on developing their students' communicative competence as the language centres do. It is clear that contextual factors directly or indirectly affect students' perceptions of their teachers' strategies.

In the interviews, the students provided their beliefs about the strategies employed by their teachers. In general, they highly appreciated all those strategies. They also expressed ideas that their teachers' practices sometimes did not satisfy their expectations.

The students stated their perceptions of their teachers' grouping strategies. They desired to choose their group members actively and remain during the school year. They reported that English proficiency level among the members was a key role in structuring a group. However, they had different views on grouping by level. While 6 students claimed that students with high academic achievement and students with lower academic achievement should be in a group since they could help each other, S3 disagreed with the idea. She said, "low-level students may affect the accomplishment of the entire group". The students also responded that they enjoyed such group tasks as presentations and debates. S4 expressed her view as "I love to state my view of a particular issue in front of a crowd. I would also like to answer my friends' questions no matter if they are positive or negative. I want to reserve my perspective". However, they were not into role-play as it was considered "mechanical" to them.

The students also provided their beliefs in the warm-up strategies. They expected their teachers' warm-up questions to be based on the main unit's theme. They also reported that they

preferred open-ended questions to yes/no questions. S3 further elaborated: “It provides students with more opportunities to show their ideas. On the other hand, with yes/no questions, students must depend on the idea planned by the teacher, and this generally reduces the variety of opinions”. Some students also responded that they rarely played educational games, so they could not state their perception of it. However, they said that they expected to try playing games. Also, they expressed an interest in visual aids such as pictures or videos for brainstorming. Furthermore, they desired to have various warm-up activities to avoid monotony.

I have not got lots of experience playing any educational games before, so I do not know how to explain this. [...] My teachers usually used pictures and videos for us to discuss, and I think they are quite interesting (S1).

The students reported how they perceived their teachers’ topic strategies. They stated their favourite topics including tourist sites, exploration, foreign cultures, history, environment, biology, photography, and society. Besides, they considered suggested topics by interviewed teachers such as fashion, hobbies, family and friends, music, film, and food too original. The participants asserted that teachers’ topics did not make them feel like communicating. Likewise, these students believed that the topics from their textbooks were average because they were so familiar with these topics. The students considered visual aids and prior readings as great solutions for them to treat difficult topics. They explained that when they had more information about the topic, they were more self-confident to communicate. On the contrary, these students were afraid of being considered silly when communicating about something they did not well experience. They exhibited a positive attitude towards argumentative topics. However, they also perceived that it also depended on a particular topic that should be interesting to them. S6 expressed her idea as:

I find presentations and arguments good to be involved in as group work; however, the topics for the activities should be my favourite, or at least, they should make me feel interested. If not so, I will not be enthusiastic to communicate.

The students also showed their beliefs in the teachers’ corrections strategies. They believed that teachers’ correction greatly affected their learning. They pointed out that, sometimes, their teachers’ corrections could determine how their lesson began or ended positively or negatively. Moreover, they preferred that their teachers corrected them directly since it could provide an instant correction. They agreed on both individual and to-whole-class corrections. They suggested that teachers could rely on a certain situation to decide which one

was more suitable. The students preferred that their teachers would wait until they finished their performance to correct them. They claimed that immediate correction during their communication could sidetrack their flow of ideas. They did not want their talks to be interrupted by teachers' corrections. They also expected their teachers to highlight their progress and strengths before the teachers mentioned their weaknesses and corrected their errors. Accordingly, it was the teachers' friendliness that could motivate them to communicate.

I think everybody likes compliments and positive comments. Therefore, if there is something bad about my work, but my teacher still makes a reference to my successful aspects,

I will really appreciate it and feel encouraged to keep it up (S4).

The students expected their teachers to create a dynamic classroom environment instead of an unfailingly serious atmosphere. They believed that a relaxing and friendly class atmosphere was ideal for them to study. Some students acknowledged their teachers' humorous experiences and support. S4 explained that "sometimes we have a boring lesson, but that my teacher tells us some jokes or funny stories that can create a vivid and friendly classroom, to me, he has a strong sense of humour".

The students also provided their perceptions of the other motivational strategies. All students believed that praise could motivate them and make them confident. This strategy was believed by the students to be a kind of reward. Furthermore, teachers giving pluses were preferred by all the students with some notes. S3 claimed that "pluses should be rewarded only when there is a particular challenge, to a mediocre conversation, they should not be". S2 suggested that "the teacher should use this strategy to encourage low-achieving students" instead of the whole class. S4, however, asserted that if teachers do as S2 suggested, "it is not fair for average students because someone considers them high-achieving students, other ones consider them low-achieving students. This can lead to adverse arguments and disagreements amongst students". Besides, all students preferred being assigned projects for preparation at home before they were required to perform in class. This was reported to make them feel more confident. S4 explained that it was "because I have enough time to elaborate on my piece of work. In this way, I can be more confident about what I will talk about and how I will present it". Also, the students suggested that their teachers should not force them to communicate and only let them communicate when they feel ready. As noted by some students, it was great that teachers gave further consultancy after class.

Discussion

The current study explored the strategies employed by Vietnamese EFL teachers to encourage students' WTC and students' beliefs about their teachers' strategies in a specific context in Vietnam. The analysis of the collected data indicated that the teachers used a wide range of strategies that generally encouraged their students' WTC, and such strategies generally satisfied students' expectations.

Interviews with teachers revealed that the teachers were aware of their role in promoting students' communication inside the classroom. Most of the strategies employed by the teachers to encourage their students' WTC are indicated in the current literature. These teachers grouped their students with different English proficiency levels. Devos (2016) explains that learners can learn from their peers' "content understanding and foreign language use while engaging in various activities" (p. 147). According to van de Pol et al. (2010) and Vygotsky (1978), peer scaffolding can be applied in the form of group work. It might be necessary for the teachers to regard ZPD as peers can scaffold each other (Hung & Nguyen, 2022; van de Pol et al., 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). According to Riasati (2012), L2 learners may prefer to be in pairs or groups to speak. It might help them feel more confident rather than speaking individually. Many studies (e.g., Hung, 2019) indicated that conflicts between group members can contribute to the success of group work. Also, students may need time to prepare during the structure phase before group work (Hung, 2019; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Results also showed that these teachers employed a variety of strategies to correct their students, among which positive feedback stood out. These strategies were considered to both improve students' performance and perceived self-efficacy (Bui, Hoang, & Nguyen, 2022; Peifer et al., 2020). It may be essential that teachers consider the appropriateness of their correction strategies to facilitate language acquisition and error correction. Most of the teachers neglected the role of the learning environment. They associated the learning environment with the facilities, and, therefore, were administrators' responsibility. However, the learning environment includes social issues (Bui, 2022). It can be a driving force for students to communicate with other social agents in the classroom, including teachers and peers (Peng, 2014). However, the attempts made by the teachers mainly aimed to encourage students' communication. As in the aforesaid, WTC refers to students' active engagement in communication and initiation of communication from their desire. We argue that the teachers' encouragement of communication in the classroom only had momentary effects (Fallah, 2014; Öz et al., 2015), but language learning and acquisition is a long-term pursuit (Dörnyei, 2009; Hromova, 2019; Vygotsky, 1978). It

might be better for the teachers to update strategies to encourage L2 WTC to make students find the need to initiate communication inside the classroom.

To address RQ2, interviews were administered and showed students' positive perceptions of their teachers' strategies. They agreed on the majority of the strategies. According to Nguyen and Hung (2021) and Öz et al. (2015), students' positive attitudes toward strategies employed by teachers can change their attitudes and lead to actions in L2 learning. As noted by Dörnyei (2009), the L2 learning experience is one of the three dimensions of L2 motivation. This means when students find their learning experience enjoyable, they are motivated to learn and have greater learning outcomes (Ellis, 2008; Hromova, 2019). Results showed that the students enjoyed their L2 learning experience which helped enhance L2 learners' WTC (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2021; Khajavy et al., 2018; Li et al., 2022). They felt more confident and motivated to socially interact when their teachers employed motivational strategies. As in the aforesaid, WTC is mainly associated with such factors as motivation (e.g., Fallah, 2014; Hashimoto, 2002; Öz et al., 2015), L2 anxiety (e.g., Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2021; Khajavy et al., 2018; Li et al., 2022), and L2 self-confidence (e.g., Fallah, 2014; Riasati, 2012). Accordingly, students' positive attitudes towards teachers' strategies and teachers' friendliness could reduce L2 anxiety and increase L2 self-confidence. Furthermore, the students thought that teachers' behaviour itself could motivate them to communicate. As Violanti et al. (2018) put it, teacher immediacy may promote L2 learners' academic performance as it can increase students' desire to speak out their opinions. Johnson et al. (2019) also explained that teacher immediacy may make students feel that their teachers cared for and valued them.

Conclusion

The findings highlighted the strategies employed by Vietnamese EFL teachers to encourage their students' WTC. The teachers mainly used six strategy groups, such as grouping strategies, warm-up strategies, topic choice strategies, teachers' correction strategies, class atmosphere strategies, and motivational strategies. It is the main role of L2 teachers to foster their students to communicate. To achieve the goal, they need to be aware of WTC which is the closest antecedent to authentic communication (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Also, teachers need to understand their students' perceptions of the encouraging strategies to appropriately select strategies to motivate students to communicate.

Situated among a limited body of research on WTC, this study expands the literature on WTC in Asian EFL contexts, especially in Vietnam. It provides insights into strategies

employed by EFL teachers to encourage students' WTC and students' beliefs about such strategies. As WTC is a dynamic concept (Öz et al., 2015), sociocultural factors can affect it. Students may prefer the strategies applied in one context, but such strategies can be rejected by students in another context. Teachers may use the strategies to encourage their L2 students' WTC flexibly by considering contextual factors. Teachers could enhance students' L2 WTC inside the classroom by using strategies. It is important to note that teacher-related variables, including friendliness, could make students willing to communicate. As beliefs are context-sensitive, it is important for teachers to understand students' beliefs about their strategies to encourage WTC inside the classroom. This study arouses teachers' awareness of the essence of WTC inside the classroom and students' beliefs about the strategies employed by their teachers.

This study shows two main limitations. First, the sample was limited. With 15 participants (seven teachers and 8 students) in a specific context in Vietnam, the results did not show high generalizability. Future studies can include a larger sample in other EFL contexts. Second, data mainly relied on the participants' self-reports. Future studies can examine the effects of L2 teachers' strategies inside the classroom with experimental results and classroom observations.

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